

The FBI as a Campus Cop ^{Post 9/28/70}

By artfully mixing some obvious facts with some ominous possibilities, President Nixon has come up with a clever set of legislative proposals on campus unrest that seem to be slipping through the Congress with alarming ease. First, the obvious facts:

- (1) The college campuses have been targets of bombings and other violent disorders.
- (2) The voters are very upset with the general state of order on the campuses.
- (3) The members of Congress are very aware that the voters are very upset.
- (4) It is very nearly time for the members of Congress to go home and face the voters.

With all of this in the air, Mr. Nixon has requested, and already won prompt House Judiciary Committee support for legislation that would authorize the FBI to intervene in campus bombings or incendiary cases, whether requested or not, with court-sanctioned wiretapping and without even more than some *information* of a bombing plot.

At a glance, there might not seem anything wrong with this—and a glance is about all that the House members are likely to give it for just that reason. But it is an open invitation, loosely drawn, for the FBI to prowl about on almost any campus, despite the proviso that it is directed at institutions receiving federal aid. Actually, the language accepted by the House committee refers to "whoever maliciously damages or destroys, or attempts to damage or destroy, by means of an explosive, any building, vehicle, or other personal or real

property in whole or in part owned, possessed, or used by, or leased to, the United States, any department or agency thereof or any institution or organization receiving federal financial assistance . . ."

Certainly the FBI can be invaluable in helping to crack such cases; but the fact is, the FBI *already* may enter such cases when asked to do so by local authorities. Just because this is primarily a state and local function, we believe it should not be an automatic signal for a federal takeover of campus investigations against the wishes of local law enforcement agencies, not to mention the judgments of college administrators.

Coupled with a request for 1,000 more FBI agents, it all has a taste of the very sort of federal repression that the campus protestors—and arsonists and bombers—have fed upon in efforts to justify criminal acts. There is also in it at least the suggestion of an unsubstantiated prejudgment by the administration that there is a real nationwide youth conspiracy afoot, in fact.

And yet the President has been saying that the responsibility for maintaining order on campus rests with the administrators, not the federal government. Certainly, the academic leadership must be firm in cracking down on violence; so should local authorities; so should the FBI when necessary. But Congress, which looks as if it will be back for some lame-duck, post-election business, ought to take this opportunity to give these loose proposals some sober, post-election second thoughts.